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THE NDP AND THE STRUGGLE

FOR A

SOCIALIST CANADA

POLITICAL SCIENCE 421D

FOR: NORM PENNER
BY: BRYAN BELFONT

THE NDP AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A SOCIALIST CANADA

The first ten years

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The NDP and the Struggle for a Socialist Canada

> ..."It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously, take root, and embrace as much as possible the whole American proletariat, than that it should start and proceed from the beginning on theoretically perfectly correct lines. There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's own mistakes. And for a whole large class, there is no other road, especially for a nation so eminently practical and so contemptuous of theory as the Americans. The great thing is to get the working class to move as a class; that once obtained, they will soon find the right direction, and all who resist, Henry George or Powderly, will be left out in the cold with small sects of their own. Therefore I think also

the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionized from within."
(From a letter that Engels wrote to the American socialist Florence Kelly, December 28, 1886)

1) THE FORMATION OF THE NDP (1958-1961)

With the 1958 joint call for "a new party" by the leadership of the just-united Canadian Labour Congress and the officers of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the struggle over the character and role of what was to become the NDP began.

Should it be a party seeking office to legislate extensive economic and social reforms within the existing framework of Canadian capitalist society? Should it be a party committed to the winning of political office for the establishment of a fundamentally new social order? Could it even take off as a revolutionary party, not a "labour party" of the British type, but a mass political expression of the working class that, given a favorable conjuncture, would be a movement of revolutionary action?

Or indeed, should it be a party at all? Perhaps it should be a pressure force on the other existing political parties so that one of them would hopefully respond to the needs of the people. Or should it attempt to serve as a catalyst for some kind of new progressive alignment of forces?

From the years 1958 to 1961 and the Ottawa convention, that was the gamut of the debate. With its founding as an independent party based on the trade unions the decisive question in this debate was resolved. With that the NDP crossed what could be said to be the Rubicon. The NDP became a key element for a whole historic period in the radicalization of the Canadian working class which can only find solution in the establishment of a socialist Canada *(emphasis by the Web ed.)*

Thus while the debate continues to rage on, it is now in a totally different context than it was in 1958-1961 — it is inside of and around a party with a substantial base of support in the ranks of the working class that is seeking political power. Now it involves the key question of program. And it now involves the organization of those forces who have grasped some of the essential elements of that program so that they can win
to their side those contingents of the working class, both inside the NDP itself and those looking at it from the outside, often critically and from even a more left vantage point -- all those elements in Canadian society to whom the NDP is now clearly an integral part of their continued political development.

Just last month the Ontario New Democratic Party leadership launched a sharp attack on a strong left wing current within the party, the so-called Waffle — committed, as the title of its founding manifesto spells out, to fight in the NDP and on the Canadian political scene "For an Independent and Socialist Canada." The resolution adopted by the

Ontario provincial council in March 1972 by a vote of 157 to 62 expressed "grave anxiety... at the emergence of a distinct group within the party... with structures and policies separate and different from those of the party." Provincial leader Stephen Lewis red-baited the Waffle as providing "a forum for extremists like Maoists and Trotskyists, whose views are not dissent but destruction, not idelological but pathological." *(Stephen Lewis' speech to March 18 Provincial Council meeting reprinted in the* Ontario New Democrat *March-April 1972)*

There seems to be no question whatsoever that the NDP, for the entire next period, is inextricably locked into the struggle for a socialist Canada.

It did not, in 1961, at its founding convention in Ottawa take the path of some kind of pressure organization, as a ginger group at the side of or inside of one of the existing political parties, e.g., the capitalist Liberal party. The Liberal party had sedulously fostered illusions that it was a party of Liberal and even pro-labor and working class opinion. During and following the war these illusions were heightened by the Communist party's open support of the Liberal party (see Gad Horowtiz' *Canadian Labor and Politics*). The Trades and Labor Congress (AFL--*the [US] American Federation of Labor --ed.)* officially endorsed the King government in 1945. Liberal leader Louis St. Laurent in a well publicized statement said that there was no real or substantial difference between the Liberal party and the CCF. "The CCF are Liberals in a hurry." And it did not become a catalyst for, or a part of, some new democratic national coalition, although there were important forces attempting to direct it that way in the crucial debates of 1958 to 1961.

On the one hand there were elements of the leadership of the trade union movement, largely concentrated in the international craft unions dominated by "roadmen" — appointees of the U.S. based union leadership. And on the other hand there were the once influential, but now rapidly declining forces organized as the Communist Party of Canada.

This is how one labor reporter saw the debate shaping up at that time. "The Canadian unionists are not seeking a 'Labour Party' such as exists in Great Britain and the creation of which has long been opposed in the United States. Instead they are seeking a coalition of liberal groups in all levels of Canadian life that will draw the line sharply between liberals and conservatives regardless of party name."

The same reporter had this to say about the contribution of David Lewis, now leader of the NDP: "He pointed out that labor leaders themselves were strongly in favor, not of a 'Labor Party' as such but a movement embracing all progressive groups." *(Reported in the* Record*, Aug. 17, 1958, official organ of the International Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union – AFL-CIO)*

The Communist Party sought to influence the NDP to become "a democratic national coalition of patriotic forces for peace, Canadian independence, and social progress."

It even advised those pressing for an independent party with a socialist policy:

"We suggest that they consider the constituency that the NDP is designed to represent and upon which it must be based." There already is a "party of socialism in Canada," they pontificated, "that is the Communist Party." *(See Communist Party's National Executive Committee Statement and comments in* Canadian Tribune*, Aug. 28, and* Pacific Tribune*, Sept. 1, 1961.)*

The forces for an independent political party, who got the New Democratic Party underway were widely disparate both in their size and influence and in their fundamental or long range aims.

The most influential elements were the CCF parliamentarians, with the remnants of the CCF constituency organizations, and key elements of the trade union leadership, particularly those in key industrial concentrations such as steel and auto, with their organized structures including the political action committees, and union funds.

The latter, many of whom had previously been supporters of the CCF were being joined by new forces from the trade unions -- new elements from the shop floors, secondary layers of the union leadership and even top leaders of unions that up until recently had steered clear of political involvement. They were being goaded by an all-out legislative attack by one provincial government after another, designed to restrain the unions from winning wage increases and improved conditions, from conducting united actions with other unions, and from organizing unorganized sections of the work force.

Newfoundland Premier Smallwood's smashing of the efforts of the International Wood Workers of America (CLC-AFL-CIO) to organize the impoverished loggers in that province in the Spring of 1959, his vicious attacks on established trade union leaders as "highwaymen and outlaws", as "gangsters" and "paid representatives of pimps," his incitement of vigilantes, and his employment of the RCMP which resulted in the death of a constable and murder charges against a striker, and his enactment of the most repressive anti-labor legislation on the continents -- were an important factor in the decision of new elements in the trade union movement to throw their weight behind the construction of an independent political party.

The New Party clubs, designed to attract persons outside of the CCF and the unions, "Liberals with a small '1' and progressives from the Progressive Conservatives", as CLC president Jodoin expressed it, brought in modest numbers of professional white collar and petty bourgeois, disillusioned by the Liberal party's support of the cold war and the Diefenbaker government's switch to acceptance of nuclear arms on Canadian soil.

Ironically it was the conscious, socialist left that was least prepared to participate in the formation and the shaping of policy of the New Party.

For some years the CCF leadership had been steadily moving to the right — but not without considerable opposition. An important rallying point for the left had been the party's founding statement of purposes called the *Regina Manifesto*. Written in the depth of the depression it committed the party to fundamental social change. The second paragraph of the manifesto read:

"We aim to replace the present capitalist system, with its inherent injustice and inhumanity, by a social order from which the domination and exploitation of one class by another will be eliminated, in which economic planning will supersede unregulated private enterprise and competition, and in which genuine democratic self- government, based upon economic equality will be possible.... We believe that these evils of capitalism can be removed only in a planned and socialized economy in which our natural resources and the principal means of production and distribution are owned, controlled and operated by the people."

The section on External Relations states: "We stand resolutely against all participation in imperialist wars.... Canada must refuse to be entangled in any more wars fought to make the world safe for capitalism." And the *Manifesto* ends: "No CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth."

The long, ebbing and flowing fight of the CCF left wing that had polarized around the banner of the Regina Manifesto came to a close at the Winnipeg convention of 1956. There, a new manifesto replacing the *Regina Manifesto* which had long been a dead letter in the real life of the movement, was adopted. In the spirit of a statement by M.J. Coldwell that "capitalism is a tolerable system" it declared that "there will be need for private enterprise" and that "the co-operative commonwealth will therefore provide appropriate opportunities for private business as well as publicly-owned industry." The adoption of the *Winnipeg Declaration* wrote finish to the CCF left. There were brave words uttered by some about restructuring the CCF but they came to nothing. Only a few scattered elements of this Left which had no structured form independent of the CCF itself, responded to the challenge of the new party as it began to take on structured form.

The only organized socialist current that identified with the New Party were the Socialist Educational League of Toronto and the Socialist Information Center in Vancouver — known among the Left as Trotskyists. They were knit together with co-thinkers across the country through their press *Workers Vanguard.*

The Trotskyists had long held a position of critical but unconditional support to the CCF. In 1948, they concluded that the CCF had completed a transition from a basically agrarian protest movement to a labor party formation. As early as May 1958, the editors of *Workers Vanguard* speculated that the secret machinations being conducted by the CCF and CLC leaderships would probably mean the formation of "a

broad genuine farmer-labor party." With that the Trotskyists became all-out advocates of this emerging labor party.

Typical was an article in the Mid-July 1961 issue of *Workers' Vanguard*, entitled; "Join and Build the New Party Now." It addressed itself particularly to "all socialists, no matter what their tendency."

We think that it is worth quoting at length as it reveals how the only socialists who supported the New Party even prior to its founding convention saw the dynamics of the party.... which is the subject of this essay.

It characterized the founding of the party as "the most important event in the history of the tumultuous struggle of the Canadian people for political and social justice."

It stated that the aim of Canadian revolutionary socialists, no matter under what form they functioned has always been "the launching of the whole working class, and getting it moving forward as a class in the right direction... With the founding of the new party based on the trade unions, the primary organization of the working class, this aim has been realized *(emphasis by the Web ed.)*

"We cannot say at this time with what degree of political clarity this new labor party will be launched. It is probable that the efforts of this left wing at this time to win the party to a class struggle program and a socialist policy will be only moderately successful. But the main thing is that, now, following this convention, the working people of this country will be moving forward as a class, with a political party of their own.

"With that they will commence to learn how to combat the capitalist class and their political leadership, the Tories and Liberals. With that they will be able to test the contending viewpoints within the party."

While they threw their slender resources into building the New Party, in particular trying to convince socialists to join in, at the same time the Trotskyists fused their two main forces and launched the League for Socialist Action. **They explained this with the comment that "such a development as the New Party is too precious to be left in the hands of the present leadership of trade unions and those whose policies led to their burying the CCF. To realize the possibilities inherent in it, the new party needs a class struggle program and a socialist perspective"** *(emphasis by the Web ed.)*

The League was depicted as "an important beginning for the building of a national force that could appeal to socialists, trade union militants, and new layers of workers and youth who are being attracted to the new party and who know, or will yet become aware, that it must adopt a socialist program.

"But as it's name implies the League will not rest content with merely advancing ideas. As an integral part of the new labor party it will attempt to mobilize the forces of the new party into action — anti-capitalist, socialist action*(emphasis by the Web ed.)*

"That is what the new party must be — a party that will not only organize the Canadian working class but will give leadership and direction and will win the power. That is what the League wants it to do. To realize this aim the League for Socialist Action must be built from coast to coast."

2) THE FOUNDING CONVENTION -- August 1961

The New Party got underway at the 1961 Ottawa convention with great promise. There were some 1,801 voting delegates — 681 of them from union bodies affiliated to 49 national or international unions, 707 delegates represented the CCF, and 248 represented New Party clubs. Significantly some 200 delegates came from Quebec.

But at the same time as this convention demonstrated great promises it also revealed the explosive contradictions lodged within the New Democratic party.

T.C. Douglas in his acceptance speech as leader, to tremendous applause, declared his acceptance of "the Prime Minister's challenge of fighting an election on the issue of socialism versus free enterprise." But immediately after his election in an interview with a Southam press reporter he described as the objective of the party, not a socialist society at all but the "establishment of a welfare state.... as in Britain and the Scandinavian countries or Israel" *(T.C. Douglas speech extracted in* Workers' Vanguard*, Mid-August, 1961.)*

At the same time as the founding convention revealed the promise of the New Democratic party, it also revealed profound contradictions that are built right into it, explosive and irreconcilable contradictions which render it incapable of being itself an instrument for realizing a Socialist Canada, but rather a vehicle on the forward march to its realization. It is both on the way and in the way towards the making of a revolution in Canada.

Contrary to superficial appearances and claims by some of its components, the new party was open-ended both in membership and ideology. Its structure was clearly defined on several planes. Coldwell once described the CCF as a movement of men and women of good-will. Of course, it did not exist in a vacuum -- it came together, perhaps on various degrees of understanding, but nonetheless with a clear rejection of the concept that the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and Social Credit parties were useful instruments. It was formed in opposition against them and in contest with them for office on all levels. It was not formed out of some explosive rupture of a cross-Canada character that had to sort itself out, but found itself through the joint efforts of two

influential and well-defined forces — the CCF and the Canadian Labour Congress — the leadership of which had clearly marked out physiognomies and objectives.

The CCF existed in the form at one pole of associations constituted on a riding basis and at the other, on the old CCF parliamentary caucus. The riding associations were largely electoral apparatuses whose purpose with the call of an election was to deliver the vote and strengthen the parliamentary caucus, ultimately to enable it to take office.

The CCF leadership was completely parliamentarist, completely electoralist. Parliament and parliament alone was the path of social change. In so far as it was even aware of the Marxist concept that parliament is only a facade to cover the nakedness of a state apparatus constructed to defend bourgeois property by force and violence if necessary and at best a propaganda platform for the working class opposition, the CCF leadership completely rejected this formulation. The future of Canadian society according to them was to be determined ultimately by winning the majority of the seats in the House of Commons which, when it passed the necessary legislation, the Canadian capitalist class would accept as a gambler the fall of the dice.

This gave the decisive authority to the parliamentary caucus rather than to the periodic conventions of the party membership. The latter had essentially an advisory position. While it was the function of the constituency associations to win votes it was the function of the Canadian people to go to the ballot box when the party in power declared it time to mark an "X" opposite a recommended name.

With such concepts politics for the CCF leadership became not one of objective analysis of the crisis in society and the development and popularization of a program reflecting the needs of the majority of the population, the working people and their mobilization to carry it through, but of searching out formulas and gimmicks that would win friends and influence people. It tried to sense what would win votes and suppressed anything that might be considered likely to lose votes. The CCF leadership came to the convention already largely a homogeneous force in the realm of program, with the added prestige of already being in place — in parliament, where everything was to be resolved.

The other influential and organized force that came to the convention was the leadership of the key sectors of the Canadian Labour Congress. Some of them had risen in the union movement after having already been in the CCF apparatus; others had recently swung over, largely in response to the combined employer-government anti-labor drive.They brought with them an apparatus formed on a day-to-day basis of conflict with employers, and considerable material resources. While they tended to talk more militantly than the CCF leadership, in general they saw eye to eye with them.

While prominent spokespersons from both the CCF and the trade union leadership on occasion identified themselves as socialists, it was seldom, if ever, with any class struggle concepts — it seldom transcended humanist , and socialism was almost always

presented as some distant and ultimate objective never related to any immediate aspects of the struggle.

While in numbers in the sea of delegates, the CCF and Trade union leadership were relatively small, they were a homogeneous force, with articulate and established figures, they were well-organized and they knew what they wanted.

At the other pole were the socialists, the Marxian conscious socialists. They were considerably fewer in numbers. They covered a wide spectrum of opinion — spanning positions all the way from what could be called the orthodox Marxists, the small number associated with the League for Socialist Action and former members or sympathizers of the crisis-ridden Communist Party of Canada, to left-reformists in motion toward becoming social democrats.

Among them were a few well established figures -- Michel Chartrand, Dorothy Steeves, Colin Cameron. They were unable to unite as an effective force other than somewhat uneasily behind Hazen Argue, a longstanding CCF M.P. who unexpectedly presented himself as the left in the contest with T.C. Douglas for federal leader of the party.

In between these two poles were the large body of delegates. The bulk of them had been to previous CCF or CLC conventions but there were many fresh forces inspired by the possibilities of a new party with a firm basis of support in the union movement. And there were a scattering of youth especially student youth, the forerunners of the new radicalization that was appearing on the horizon.

One of the key debates at the convention was on the program of the new party. The draft preamble had met such opposition in the various areas of pre-convention discussion that a new draft was presented — it was said to have been drawn up by Frank Scott, one of the authors of the Regina Manifesto, and was alleged to be a "vast improvement."

Instead of a class analysis of Canadian society, an identification with the struggles of the working class and a commitment to public ownership and a planned economy, the preamble to the program identified with those "who put human rights and human dignity above the mere pursuit of wealth, and public welfare before corporate power."

While some delegates frontally opposed those who sought to commit the movement to replacement of capitalism with a new social order, others such as T.C. Douglas intervened to win approval of the preamble by appealing to the powerful sentiment in the convention for unity and to get on with the job. The debate burst out anew on the section entitled "Jobs for All," when delegates challenged how this aim could be realized without a struggle for a 30-hour (work-)week with 40 hours pay and ultimately through workers control and ownership of the basic means of production.

One delegate frankly stated that rather than a labor or socialist party the new party should be a new liberal party. The name chosen by the party was obviously an attempt to

establish a forward image within an orthodox framework through cashing in on the widespread illusions at the time about John F. Kennedy, leader of the capitalist Democratic Party, and President of the U.S. But the leadership adopted a more subtle approach in order to carry its liberal-reformist line. Steel leader William Sefton suggested that the party would do what was necessary. Paraphrasing a famous statement of William Lyon Mackenzie King he said -- "we too are for socialism if necessary, but not necessarily for socialism."

In his acceptance speech, T.C. Douglas' main pitch was: "This is not the time to argue about right wing or left wing; this is the time to unite all our forces for the task which lies ahead" *(extracted from Workers' Vanguard, mid-August 1961).*

The sharpest debate was not on the overall objective of the party which for many seemed abstract and unrelated to the immediate challenge before the party but on Canada's continued membership in the cold-war NATO military alliance. Of the 24 resolutions on the question 22 were for immediate Canadian withdrawal from NATO —the position adopted by the last CCF convention only the year before. With incredible cynicism T.C. Douglas, just elected as leader of the party, intervened in the debate to blackmail the delegates by placing his resignation on the table. He made it clear that as leader he had no intention of accepting a policy which was anti-NATO. "After all," he said, "it is I who will have to explain the policy" *(emphasis by the Web Ed.)*

Thus the New Democratic Party got underway. Not as a party casting Canada in a new role on the world political arena -- speaking up as an anti-war, anti-NATO force, but committed to continue the Liberal-Tory alignment of the Canadian people behind a foreign policy of defence of capitalism on the European continent and colonialism in Africa and Asia. Not as a party with a class struggle program and a socialist objective but with a peaceful co-existence with Canadian capitalism program and, where it is defined at all, a patchwork of piecemeal reforms.

3) THE EARLY YEARS – 1961-1963

Various forces amongst the left drew different balance sheets of the Founding convention. With his failure to win the leadership Hazen Argue not only broke from the NDP but crossed the house to join the Liberal party and eventually found a seat in the Senate. (B.C. MP) Colin Cameron after years as a spokesman for the socialist viewpoint in the party became one of the leading official voices of the Douglas-Lewis leadership's positions in the House of Commons, while another B.C. M.P. Bert Herridge moved more consistently to the left in the NDP.

The editors of *Workers' Vanguard* took assurance, despite the defeat of the left in the conviction that "the new labor party comes onto the scene at a time of developing crisis at home and a rising curve of successful anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggles abroad.

"Nothing," they said, "neither demagogy of the leadership nor bureaucratic restraints on the rank and file can shelter the new party from these events. Already the leadership's policies are being riddled with fissures. Subsequent events are certain to reveal their falseness to ever-widening ranks of the Canadian working class who are looking to the new party to meet their needs and aspirations. At long last," they concluded," the working class of Canada has a mass political party of its own. It is within this party, through their experiences in struggle with the capitalist class and their political lackeys in the Liberal, Tory and Social Credit parties, that they will test the contending views and through which they forge the leadership which will construct a socialist Canada of peace and plenty."

In the next few months the founding conventions of various provincial sections of the NDP came off with the same high enthusiasm and confidence as did the federal Convention.

However the first tests of the NDP at the polls in five by-elections in populous Ontario failed to meet the anticipations of many, including veterans of CCF campaigns who thought that increased funds, glossier and slicker campaign literature and the image of victory would work. The NDP leaderships election strategy was based on the concept that the Liberal party was on the decline that there would be a polarization between the NDP and the Tories in government which would see Liberal votes swing to the NDP. The labor vote was thought to be in a bag. This strategy was used to justify the removal of even the least hint of socialism from the party's campaign, and to try to appear as alike the Liberal party as possible to ease this anticipated massive shift.

But the NDP vote increased only marginally over the old CCF vote — in some polls the NDP failed to even match that. On top of that the Liberals underwent a resurgence.

Attempts were made to explain this failure as being due to the red-baiting of the party. M.P. Erhart Regier charged in the House of Commons that the Liberal party was responsible -- that it had conducted "an almost complete house to house telephone canvass urging support of the NDP in the name of the Communist party of Canada" *(Hansard, January 25, 1962)*

As the June 18, 1962 federal election approached, a red-baiting campaign swept across the country. The Tories red-baited Liberal leader Pearson. The Liberals Cuba-baited the Tory Deifenbaker government — and the NDP leadership. While it was apparent that the NDP was the campaign's principle target, apparently in the belief that the best defence is to join in, the NDP leadership did just that. NDP leader Douglas at the CLC Vancouver convention accused the Chamber of Commerce of behaving like reds in its Operation Freedom campaign. The provincial council of the Ontario NDP circulated a letter to all presidents, secretaries and candidates stating that it is "very much concerned about the communist problem in the coming election," and warned about Communists and Trotskyists infiltrating the party. It urged candidates to proclaim their purity from taint of communism and warned them to screen out of their organization any of these subversives or even ex-subversives. The Quebec NDP central office even went so far as to open its membership lists to the RCMP for examination.

The June l8, 1962 federal election saw the NDP poll 13.9% of the vote in contrast to the 11% polled by the CCF in 1957, as political alignments and loyalties continued to break down. In 1957 hundreds of thousands dumped their former allegiance by voting Tory, and throwing out the 22 year old Liberal machine.

1962 was one of continued fluidity with a powerful shift away from the government — but it landed up behind the Liberals. The only significant NDP gains were in BC and Metro Toronto.

In consternation the editors of the party's major paper, the weekly *Prairie New Democrat* asked "How is it possible that the NDP in the province was not more successful?" And replied; "The answer is simple. We have failed to explain to the general public the social and political issues involved. A public which properly understood the principles and aims of New Democracy would not turn away from it" *(Prairie New Democrat, June 27, 1962)*.

Portraying the dilemma that even the NDP leadership, with their liberal-reformist policies felt themselves to be in, was their decision to reproduce a column by Pierre Berton that appeared in the *Toronto Star* in mass circulation dailies from coast to coast. Berton ridiculed them for "desperately trying to pretend that the NDP really isn't radical, unorthodox, daring, imaginative or in any sense un-Canadian," but they saw that it could be used to advantage. Berton's column ended up supporting the NDP — not for governmental office, but as a "needle and wheedle" of the capitalist parties (*Toronto Star, June 12, 1962).*

Following the federal election the Ontario leadership felt compelled to recognize the deep dissatisfaction within the party and opened up the pages of the *New Democrat* to discussion.

York Centre candidate Val Scott's contribution pointed out that the million mark presented as a historic first by the leadership "does not represent anything more than what the old CCF could have accomplished." But his view on "What's Wrong With Us" took the discussion in the direction of the need for more of what the leadership had said would win — more money, slicker pamphlets, more gimmicks — and away from program.

The Ontario provincial executive's letter warning of red infiltration of the party was not just a me-too response to the witch hunters, a verbal effort to clear itself before the witch hunters. Sections of the NDP leadership were not satisfied with having defeated at the founding convention the efforts of the socialists to give the party a program that would clearly mark it out as a party of social change.

Immediately following that convention they commenced a campaign to purge the party of the socialists. They commenced with those who they thought to be its most vulnerable elements.

The BC provincial executive proscribed the revolutionary socialist paper *Workers' Vanguard* and (also) *The Press,* a forum of general left-reformist opinion. They declared that distribution (of either paper) by any member of the BC party would be grounds for expulsion from the party. This was followed up with moves to expel three longstanding CCFers Malcolm Bruce, Ruth Bullock and Reg Bullock, then leaders of the Vancouver branch of the League for Socialist Action. The proscription of *The Press* and the *Vanguard* brought forth a wide and vigorous protest involving prominent party leaders — the moves to expel the LSAers were tabled.

In Ontario, the provincial executive adopted the device of by-passing charges and hearings etc., by simply refusing to renew membership of half a dozen NDPers alleged to be members of the LSA. In a campaign which was particularly virulent in the Ontario youth movement of the NDP, the NDY, it was alleged that the LSA was in actuality an opponent political party with an aim completely contrary to all its pronouncements — of destroying the NDP — destroying it from within.

In November '62, the provincial executive of the BC NDY tried in absentia some of the left-wing activists, expelled eight, and suspended three leading members, among them the previous year's provincial secretary and the editor of it's publication. Expressions of solidarity with the expelled came from such leading figures as M.P.s Colin Cameron, Bert Herridge, Dorothy Steeves and W.W. Lefaux. The general charge was active participation in the activities of the LSA — whose principles and policies were alleged to be contrary to those of the NDY. The North Shore NDP decided to maintain the three expelled members with full membership rights and to call upon the NDP executive to intervene and assure a fair trial — other associations called for a reversal of the youth action. While the provincial council endorsed an executive decision not to intervene a leading spokesman declared that the youth contrary to the NDY leaders wishes were still members of the adult party with full membership rights.

Rumours of expulsions long rife in the Ontario section jelled in April 1963 with the expulsion of over a dozen leading activists in the NDY on the charge of "membership in and support of another political party" — but this time it was the Young Socialist Alliance. Their expulsions were upheld by the party's provincial executive. At the same time under the impact of the results of April 8 federal elections which marked a further set-back for the NDP a public meeting of prominent BC left wingers was held in Vancouver. This meeting, attended by Dorothy Sleeves, Bert Herridge, Hugh Clifford, Jerry Lebourdais, Orville Braten, Malcolm Bruce, Ruth Bullock and others, was the scene of an intense discussion as to whether to organize a socialist caucus and whether to do so in a formal and open way or on an informal basis. The next meeting elected a 14 person committee "to prepare a draft for a socialist manifesto and a statement of aims for a left wing formation in the NDP."

4) THE SECOND CONVENTION — 1963

Reflecting the widening concern across the party, the second NDP federal convention saw the leadership present a new statement of objectives and principles containing the insertion, that the new society the party envisaged would embody the principles of "democratic socialism". The token character of this was inadvertently exposed by a party leader who challenged it from the floor since he, as a non-socialist, agreed completely with every other word in the statement.

Confronted by the expulsions in the NDY the convention passed a constitutional amendment that deprived the youth of its autonomy by taking all disciplinary powers away from it. The retiring federal president Michael Oliver's comment of the situation: "A
party like ours will always attract people who believe there is something radically wrong with society. We have to be careful," he warned, that "they don't use us to pursue aims which are external to the party" *(Workers' Vanguard, August, 1963).*

The left, organized in the LSA, the Woodsworth-Irvine Fellowship of Edmonton and the Montreal New Left Association, at this convention was joined by the BC Socialist Caucus which distributed its manifesto to the delegates.

The League for Socialist Action's convention, held just prior to the Regina NDP convention, concluded that their projection of the possibility of the NDP in its formative period having a revolutionary dynamic was terminated, largely for two reasons, the weakness of the socialist cadre and the failure of the new developing radicalization to hit the NDP in time. The widespread expulsions it said, are "not so much a sign of its (the NDP leadership's) strength as it is a sign of the as yet relatively weak connections it (the NDP) has with the class. As the labor party extends and deepens its influence we too deepen our connections; the bureaucracy will be much less able to settle accounts with its socialist opposition without endangering its whole position. It is possibly a partial awareness of this — that tomorrow will bring an influence of new militant workers and the situation will be much less favourable — that drives the NDP brass to such reckless extremes in the current drive against the left" *(Workers' Vanguard September, 1963).*

The Socialist Caucus manifesto argued the case for the party projecting a socialist objective. At the same time it presented a series of proposals on immediate problems. Along with demands for withdrawal from NATO and NORAD and "normal diplomatic and trade relations with all countries and active support of the struggles for a maintenance of national independence of all nations as represented in the Americas by Cuba," it outlined demands "to preserve the national independence of Canada.... socialization of all foreign-owned industries and the planned development of secondary industries — nationalization of all financial institutions, including insurance" *(Socialist Caucus Manifesto, signed by Cedric Cox MLA, Hugh Clifford, John Macey, July, 1963)*

The appeal of the expelled youth finally came before the Ontario Provincial Council in February 1964. The sustaining of the expulsions in one case was only carried by a vote

of 30 to 29. The *Toronto Globe and Mail* thought it significant enough to comment to the effect: "By confirming the expulsion of the ten young radicals.... the council turned decisively toward moderate economic and social planning that leaves room for both public and private enterprise" *(Toronto Globe and Mail, February 14, 1964).*

With that the expelled youth launched a paper called *Young Socialist Forum.*

In August the Ontario leadership refused a convention seat to Hugh Dowson a legally elected delegate from affiliate Local 112 UAW *(United Auto Workers, predecessor to the Canadian Auto Workers union --Ed.)* — the largest union local in the Toronto area. A *Toronto Star* editorial ridiculed the NDP for enforcing the medieval concept of this delegate's guilt by association with the LSA through his blood relationship to Ross Dowson, Executive Secretary of the LSA (*Workers' Vanguard, Mid-August, 1964).* Meanwhile, in BC, the provincial council proscribed the League for Socialist Action and expelled Ruth and Reg Bullock. In their appeals before the convention the following spring, Ruth Bullock and former NDY secretary Phil Courneyeur defended their rights to hold membership in the LSA -- one third of the delegates voted against expulsion.

5) THE THIRD CONVENTION — 1965

In the spring of 1965 the new radicalization took on the concrete form in Toronto of the massive and extended youth action in solidarity with the US black freedom struggle. The opposition to the war in Vietnam and Canada's complicity in it started to spread and grow across the country.

The third federal NDP convention saw the appearance of an open and declared Socialist Caucus which published a printed 6-point program, argued its views before the delegates, and presented a slate of candidates for the federal council. It boldly sought official recognition. M.P. Bert Herridge, who firmly identified with the Caucus, announced from the convention floor the holding of a demonstration in protest against US actions in Vietnam which took scores of delegates through Toronto downtown streets to a rally on the US consulate steps*(emphasis by the Web Ed.)*

While none of the positions of the Socialist Caucus were adopted, and none of its candidates elected, it had the consistent support of 30 to 40 delegates.

In a matter of days the Ontario leadership responded with a full page article in the *August 1965 New Democrat* smearing the Socialist Caucus as "the most recent Trotskyite device to capture New Democrats." In recognition that the caucus was well rooted and had a real potential they attempted, after bludgeoning it from without to disrupt it from within, with a warning that "Radicals who wish to get one of their planks adopted by the Party convention depend on having their proposals heard in the spirit of mutual tolerance.... The presence of Trotskyites.... makes this impossible."

This threat materialized in the Spring of 1967 in the expulsions of another twelve leading activists without charges or trials, despite the protests of two Ontario area councils and nine riding associations.

But now the new radicalization was advancing and sending shock waves through every layer of North American society. The capitalist Liberal party strategists, recognizing the developing mood of impatience and frustration —" the revolution of rising expectations" -- decided to get with it, hoping to divert it and dissipate it. They boldly decided to place Pierre Elliott Trudeau with his free wheeling talk about "participatory democracy" and "the just society" to the fore as party leader.

The NDP was even more susceptible to these pressures being a minority party of dissent with roots into the masses. As M.P. Ed Broadbent notes "a good number of young people are by-passing us too. They see us as being concerned with a little more -- a little more pensions, more benefits, instead of being concerned with making a qualitative change in society." The right wing policy of the leadership, its persistent search for respectability arid acceptance, its by now well-known attacks on radical and socialist opinion in its own ranks, was firmly establishing it in many minds as another party little different from those of the parties of the establishment. But even this fear did not shake the leadership out of the liberal-reformist thought into which it was embedded, and take advantage of the possibilities of leading a powerful movement for social change. It reacted in the same way as the Liberal party bureaucrats, although its circumstances were considerably different.

6) THE 1967 CONVENTION

"The mood is radical" concluded Ontario provincial secretaryJohn Harney, in a pre-convention issue of the *New Democrat* and the party brass opened up, as had the Liberals and the Tories before them with a leadership contest. The candidates vied with one another in a battle of radical phrases and clichés; a "radical analysis", a "leadership of challenge for a party of change," a "new image". But they all carefully skirted around the issues coming up, carefully evading getting committed programatically.

Nonetheless all the radical words opened up and released sentiments which had been felt in the ranks but scarcely articulated save by the socialists grouped around the Socialist Caucus. The pressure generated by the radicalization on the leadership and their response to it, despite all of their efforts to confine it in safe channels, nonetheless in turn legitimatized and stimulated a response from the delegates to the December 1967 convention.

For the first time an Ontario provincial convention moved into the previously forbidden area of foreign affairs. Almost unanimously the convention demanded that the federal executive and M.P.s "actively advance" a policy of withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and the ending of Canadian complicity, and promote the need for the conversion of the war goods producing industry, the public development of Ontario's

resources and the initiation of a vast program of public works. It also unanimously endorsed the Czech people's struggle "to radicalize their socialism." None of the scattered proposals of the leadership were radical enough for the delegates.

One resolution committed an NDP government to public ownership of natural resources. When delegates interpreted that to mean natural resource industries, public ownership of the land, of the mines, and the gas pipelines, they were not contradicted. Other resolutions demanded the party become an activist movement involved in strikes, student struggles, tenants organizing, etc. Despite its long harassment, interest in the Socialist Caucus was high – with up to 100 delegates attending its strategy meetings. But the leadership rode the crest of the wave with its stewardship unchallenged; it could look upon the convention with a certain detachment *(emphasis by the Web Ed.)*

The Vancouver convention heard party leader T.C. Douglas orate that "we are in an age of revolt," that the NDP must give answers to the youth who are revolting against a society manipulated and controlled by an "economic oligarchy," where decisions are made in board rooms, where "law and order" is used to repress dissent – a society which carries on a genocidal war in Vietnam.... etc. But the ritual of a leadership contest was used to exclude almost all discussion on resolutions submitted by constituencies and affiliated
union locals. The socialist viewpoint was overwhelmed, by a bombastic power struggle between two "serious," "realistic" candidates although a prominent and New Left student leader presented himself for the party leadership.

The leadership's strategy of response to and manipulation of the radicalization combined, in Manitoba, with the deep disillusionment with the Liberals and Tories put the party into office. The Schreyer team with its youth and small "l" liberal image, won almost double the last NDP vote. On the other hand with a repeat performance, with the same type of campaign in BC, the NDP suffered a serious setback.

7) THE 1969 CONVENTION

Suddenly what has become known as the Waffle exploded onto the scene. It first appeared through the publication in the small circulation revolutionary socialist bi-weekly *Workers' Vanguard* in a statement entitled "For an Independent and Socialist Canada,"July 14, 1969.

The statement was issued as a contribution to the October 1969 NDP federal convention over the name of Melville Watklns who came to public attention as a member of Liberal party leader Walter Gordon's team of academics investigating foreign investments in the Canadian economy, and a group of lesser known NDPers. This move was welcomed by the small and by now isolated forces in the Socialist Caucus. It dissolved itself and joined enthusiastically with other elements into the Waffle.

There was nothing remarkably new in the “Waffle Manifesto.” Much of what it said had been said before by various leftists in the NDP. Even its nationalism, its attack on the increasing domination of Canada by American cooperate capitalism, its demand for an independent Canada which could only be won as a socialist Canada — its main thrust was not new. The same paper which first published the "Waffle Manifesto" had published in 1967 and early '68 a series of four articles which challenged the NDP to respond to this issue of important increasing public concern — the growth of Canadian nationalism which the articles characterized as an anti-imperialist sentiment. The first took on an "Open Letter to Canadian Nationalists" issued by the editors of *Canadian Dimension*, with the statement that "there can be no Canadian independence under capitalism. Canada can only be independent when the working class take the power and control the economy of this country."

But there was no question, as Harney had noted, and the top leadership had been noticing and tuning their speeches to, over the last few years -- "the mood is radical." Possibly elements in the brass thought that this too could be part of the act, for in the beginning a considerable number of established figures, not known in any way as left-wingers, signed the “Waffle Manifesto” – for example, Charles Taylor, leading theoretician of the right, who later withdrew his signature at the Winnipeg convention of October 1969. While the NDP leadership first tried to dismiss the “Manifesto” as outdated doctrinaire, anti-American and even Trotskyist, the wide response that it met and particularly its respected signatories dispensed the red-baiting and the Waffle was able to present itself as a legitimate social-democratic current with deep roots in the party.

With the Winnipeg convention, for the first time in the NDP there was a broad left formation supported by about one-third of the 1,100 delegates which caucused several times during the convention and voted unanimously to establish a continuing left-wing body to continue the fight to win the NDP to a socialist program and leadership. The Waffle in the next period moved from success to success. In August it held a national conference which showed that it was sinking important roots across the country most importantly in Saskatchewan where Waffle supporters had intervened in the party convention to win 25% of the delegates. The conference elected a 10 person steering committee *(emphasis by the Web Ed.)*

The conference at the same time threw light on a series of important problems confronting the left. Some elements, notably in BC could see no way of coping with the powerful influence in the party of trade union bureaucracy other than by urging the cutting back of union representation, other than taking an anti-union stance. The Waffle had not yet sunk real roots in the movement itself, in the constituency organizations. It was not really involved in the day to day activity of the movement, such as it is, and not in a position to go through experiences necessary to influence the party membership in any profound way. Some elements did not even hold membership in the party, had no real orientation to it and were becoming an important force pulling Waffle in the direction of substituting itself for the party, doing its own thing.

For a movement which itself was being red-baited it showed a shocking tolerance for red-baiting within its own ranks against the Trotskyists -- a disease that can block the necessary free play of ideas and that in turn opens Waffle itself to red-baiting by the right wing with some kind of "slow boat to communism" charge.

8) THE 1971 CONVENTION

The Waffle was not really involved in the main areas of radicalization itself -- the anti-Vietnam war movement, women's liberation, the student movement -- and was therefore in no way bringing this process into the NDP itself and changing the relationship
of forces within it to its favor.

But essentially these limitations only reflect the limitations of the radicalization whose main thrust is still expressed, not in the organized working class, in the trade unions or even the constituency associations of the NDP, but sectors still largely peripheral to them.

Perhaps the most important decision that the conference arrived at was to translate its widening influence and take it forward to the next level — the struggle for the leadership of the party itself.

The leadership campaign behind James Laxer, even well before the convention revealed a marked change in attitude to the Waffle on the part of the trade union and party brass, David Lewis denounced it as "extreme, dangerous nonsense," Frank Howard called for its dissolution, and UAW leader Dennis McDermott labelled it "a natural haven for every social misfit in the party." Food Workers' union leader Fred Dowling cried "Basically the Waffle did more to damage the party than anything that's happened in the past 15 years" *(Workers' Vanguard, Mid-May, 1971).*

The leadership contest, with James Laxer as the left-wing's candidate, overwhelmed everything else at the April 1971 federal convention.

Some 37% of the more than 1,600 delegates voted on the final ballot for Laxer — the vast majority of delegates under 30 years of age, almost the entire 60-member Quebec delegation and a very substantial number of women delegates. Abstracting the vote of the party office holders and the vote controlled by the trade union leadership, it would appear clear that the Left had the support of a clear majority of rank and file constituency delegates. Not only did the vote register the appeal of the Left but at the same time it revealed a real erosion of confidence in the right-wing leadership's capacity to lead the party to victory.

In 1965 the Ontario leadership in its witch-hunt against the Socialist Caucus suggested that radicals could expect to be heard "in the spirit of mutual tolerance," with the inference that the democratic processes of the party would assure that they could

even win the leadership of the party in fair debate. "The presence of theTrotskyites makes this impossible", they said. The Trotskyists of course, are a revolutionary socialist tendency. The Waffle, while still in flux, in so far as it has developed or presented a theory, is left reformist — social democratic. This is most clearly seen in Cy Gonick's paper entitled "Revolutionary Reformism; A Strategy," circulated at the 1970 national Waffle conference. Watkins himself in a recent comment dissociated himself from some New Brunswick NDPers who claimed to be Waffle as advocating policies completely outside the pale of social democracy.

While the top trade union and party leadership took a sharp and hostile turn against Waffle in the leadership campaign, their attitudes still appear to be somewhat ambivalent. This spring it is clear that they actually gave two key nominations in the coming Federal elections to two top spokespersons (Melville Watkins and Ellie Prepas) and only put on a token contest for another which Jim Laxer won. This was done however while a resolution was circulating through the Ontario movement passed by a Hamilton constituency calling for the suppression of Waffle and similar organized left-groupings in the NDP.

That resolution was used by Ontario leader Stephen Lewis at the March 1972 provincial council meeting attended by more than 200 delegates as an excuse for a sharp attack on Waffle. Lewis charged the Waffle with the same crime that has been used by social democratic party leaderships against left wing oppositions across the world. The Waffle he claimed, constituted "a party within a party". The council voted by 157 to 62 for a resolution that expressed "grave anxiety" at the emergence of a distinct group within the party.... with structures and policies separate and different from those of the party" *(Toronto Star, March 19, 1972).*

Perhaps as a suggestion of an out for the Waffle elements who have been red-baited, or went along with red-baiting in their own ranks, Lewis in his lengthy attack red-baited Waffle. He charged it with providing a "forum for extremists like Maoists and Trotskyists whose views are not dissent but destruction, not ideological but pathological." If Waffle is to be Trotsky-baited by the NDP brass in an all-out struggle, should Waffle Trotsky-bait (elements within) itself to win immunity from attack?

To date Waffle has not responded to this far-reaching attack on it. It is as yet too early to know how far the leadership is going to take this into the constituency organizations and what will be its repercussions there. But it is possible that very shortly the struggle to win the NDP to a socialist perspective will take another turn.

The NDP leadership can of course, anticipate that there will be a fall-out of support for Waffle, certainly in the whole first stage of their assault. But will Waffle blow up or split apart? The development of Waffle, as with the development of socialist currents throughout the whole past period within the NDP, is by no means accidental. It flows out of the fact that the NDP is firmly established as a labor party and that it has thereby become an essential and key arena of the inevitable radicalizing process of the Canadian working class. While the key sectors of organized labor have not yet entered the arena we

are nonetheless in a period of deepening radicalization and there could appear to be no end in sight. The radicalization constitutes a tremendous pressure on the Waffle regardless of the actions of individuals, even persons most identified with it, to stand up and fight to continue the struggle. If they do not do this at this very favourable conjuncture we can be sure that the historic process will find other suitable instruments to achieve its aim.

(end)

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Letter (from Ross Dowson) to Norman Penner, dated May 25, 1972

Thanks very much for the marginal comments on my essay and for the expanded observations.

I have only now had the opportunity to really read my essay. I had been terribly tied up in the politics of the campus and then when I really got down to working on the essay I got tied up in the theme of the essay itself. It turned out to be even more interesting than

I had thought it would be. The more I got into it the more engrossed I became. It continued to take on new dimensions as time was running out on me.

The net result is that while I think that I did a good job all around it is now very obvious to me, now that I can read it in typed form, that I really needed a couple of more days to polish it up. There are a great many errors that could easily have been eliminated and it needs some judicious editing.

I think that a number of your marginal notes and comments fall into this category and I will keep them in mind when I re-polish the essay.

Yes, you are correct. I should have inserted that the Communist Party wanted the New Party "to become (PART OF) a coalition," and not to be the coalition itself. They projected the possibility of a realignment of political forces including what they would have called progressively-minded Liberals.

Yes, you are right to put a query over my statement that "there was nothing remarkably new in the Waffle New Left." This statement would certainly seem extravagant until you read on. I meant of course – what Waffle said was not particularly new but as a current it was certainly a new phenomenon. In the same respect it is possible it seems to me to treat the New Party as a new party. Many of its components were the same as the CCF. Trade union involvement but even more the conjuncture made it new. Now some 11 years after its formation the old components have come to the fore – its least new or non-new aspects are more apparent.

Perhaps the essay is in a sense incorrectly titled. It seems to me that the NDP is for the next period key to the radicalization of the Canadian working class. In the total picture it is the subjective element in the process. For the tiny Marxist forces the NDP itself however is an objective factor.

(letter ends)